



DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

DEBORAH

D E B O R A H
A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
BY LASCELLES ABERCROMBIE

LONDON: JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
TORONTO: BELL & COCKBURN MCMXIII

Turnbull & Spears, Printers, Edinburgh

TO
PATRICK ABERCROMBIE

ACT I

PERSONS

SAUL, *a pilot.*

DEBORAH.

THE MOTHER *of Deborah's lover, David.*

MARTIN, *an old fisherman.*

MEN AND WOMEN *of the village.*

A DOCTOR.

ACT I

A fishing and pilot village on a great estuary. Low cottages on either side of bare ground sloping down to the river. The background is grey water and grey sky, and a low coast on the extreme of sight. On a rough bench beside the open door of one cottage sits moodily Saul, a pilot (L.). A group of men and women (R.) gazing earnestly up the river, among them Deborah, a girl in the early twenties, old Martin, and a woman, thought half-witted by the village (First Woman).

1st Woman. There is no help for us; we are left alone,
Left in the power of this flying thing
That hates our lives: God was the only one
Who saw it sliding down into our air;
He would not hold it back, but means to let
The wild disease play all it will with our souls.

A Man. Now hold your crying tongue, daft-witted thing;
We're thrang enough without you clamorous.

Deborah (turning aside from gazing). No sign of the boat, and we're an hour watching.

Saul. Not yet in sight?

Deborah. No.

Saul. Curse their feeble arms!
And all the time the sickness goes on working!
Let them not bring the doctor here too late

To save my Barnaby ; or if they do,
Let them not come within my sight.

Deborah. O God,
Dear God, send us some skill to help us soon.
Let them bring back with them cures for my sick
darling.

Another Woman (crouching on the ground). They
may bring back all the skill of the town,
'Twill be no good to my dears now.

Martin. Woman,
You should be with your dead.

The Woman. Don't tell me that.
Ah, but the way they cried all night ! And I
Knowing nothing of this new sudden illness,
What could I do ? I'd naught but water for them.
Now I'm like one that comes in mazed from a storm :
And I'm afraid of them, afraid to see
The darling bodies lying there so hurt ;
I'd hear their dreadful pains crying again.
I couldn't bide it, ne g'ighbours. Let me stay
And hear you talk.

Martin. But you should go to them ;
Dead or alive, children need their mother.

The Woman. No, no, I couldn't bide it.

Martin. Up with you.
Stay with them till they're earth-fast. In a month
You'll grieve you shirkt seeing them all you
might.

The Woman (suddenly leaping upright). Ah !
what's that ?

Martin. What then ?

The Woman. I heard one call :
I heard one of my children call for its mother.

Martin. Poor thing, it's daft.

The Woman (crying out). Ah !

Martin. Why do you hold your breast ?

The Woman. A great qualm took me : 'twas as
if a hand
Crusht in my heart. Be quiet, let me listen.—
Ah ! there again, like being cut inside.—
The sickness ! It has got me ! Oh good God !
Yes, I will go home to my little ones.

[*She walks off unsteadily.*]

Martin. Her children need her.

1st Woman. We've no help at all ;
We are left alone, jail'd by river and marsh ;
The malady can have all its will with us.
You don't know your plight : but I within me
Can see the thing, a ghost as grey as rain,
Fleeces of shadowy air wrapping his shape,
Tall as the winds, standing up over us,
Smiling and idly bandying with his feet
This way and that the writhing bodies like
A man turns rats that have taken the bane he laid.

Martin. Ay, do you see that ? Do you hear her,
friends ?
Those were no words of crippled wits, but speech
Out of a spirit full of aching sight.
She's seen our sickness, and the look of it
Is as the wrath of God. Will you cure that ?
The plague that's on us is the blame of the Lord ;
And all you think of is to get a doctor :
Do you mean him to make friends with God for
you ?

Deborah. What have we done, that anger should
be poured
On us more than another town ? We were
As good as any simple folk can be ;
But all in an evening down it came on us,
This tearing sickness, whether made of some
Bad breath of the marsh, or blight from over sea.
And you say none can put the fever down ?

Another Woman. The fool I was to come to
such a place,
And to have children in it! A spit of clay,
Hummockt between the river and the marsh,
A fine place for a town it is! A bairn
Would know the health of such a rotten ground.

A Man. And who can choose to build in a fair
health
But the like of nobles? We must pilot and fish,
And when we've done our day upon the water,
We can but crawl above the tide, no more,
Sleep as near our trade as we dare, or else
We shall be better'd in it.

The Woman. Just as well
Be in the tide as on this rick of slime:
It's nigh as wet, nothing but washt-up ooze
And silted umber, mere marsh steadied with clay
To be a kind of mortar, not an earth.
It takes a man to build houses on slime;
And then ask women to come bed with him,
Ay, and to child, in such a filthy place.

The Man. Ah, don't deafen us, woman. You
came blithe,
I warrant, when Matt whistled you from your
Mammy.

You know there's never choosing for us folks.

The Woman. And what's the worth of a young
girl's wits?

The Man. Why, naught.
Same as an old one's.

Martin. That's it, quarrel and snarl,
When half your people are fighting death or
dead.

You're all alike for wisdom.

2nd Man (to the Woman). Why are you fasht?
'Tis we are cruelly teased with waiting so

For medicine, we with children crying in pain,—
Deborah. Or with a sweetheart being dragged
away

By this rough dying,—

3rd Man. Or with a childing wife
Brought wrongly to her time,—Oh Christ, that I
knew

Some ease for her, even an hour's ease !

2nd Man (to the Woman). But the sickness has
lowpt over all your lot.

The Woman. Well and what then? There
never was an ailing

With such a sudden stroke as this fiend has,
All in a minute crazing your whole flesh ;
And I am flayed with fear till doctor comes
And tells us what the good thing is against it.
I lost my first bairn from your marshy air.
His life was nothing but fever from his start,
And he was gone before they signed his brow
With holy water. But had I known the place,
Would I have come? Hemm'd in behind with
quags

That half the year are fens and always quick,
With nothing of a trod way going through ;
No skill in all the place, parson or leech ;
Five miles of river for a boat to row
To fetch in either. And here's this pestilence
Killing us all and none knows how to cure it.
Maybe the sickness will learn some of you
The kind of place you have.

Martin. It's nought to do
With anything here ; it's over the whole world.

Another Woman. Look at the sorrow on Saul !
How that man loves
His little Barnaby.—O 'twould be cruel
If he should lose him now, with his wife gone.

2nd Man. No more cruel for him with one
child caught,
Than 'tis for me with two in the fearful risk.
Where are those lagging fellows? We should have
sent

Someone who had the sickness in his house.
I would have got a doctor, if it meant
Pulling him from the bedside of the Mayor.

Deborah. O but my heart is dying in me,
waiting;
With such a yearn of love in it, and all
Useless, a failure when 'tis needed most.
For us, with lives so hazardous, to love
Is like a poor girl's game of being a queen
What good are all these marvellous desires
That seem to hold life in mastery? They are
Dreamt things only. Men make no more of them
Than a hawk would make of a spider's mesh, when
life

Is fearfully desiring towards death.
O David, if you leave me, after our love!
You to go beyond the meaning of love,
And I, with your memory at my breast,
To stay behind in all the bitter meaning.

1st Man. The boat, the boat!

Deborah. O God be praised, they're coming!

Saul. Have they a doctor?

1st Man. Have they? Have they? No!

Saul. Not! Then by God I'll handle some of
them.

Deborah. Why, you poor-sighted fellow, there
he is!

That man in the stern will be a doctor, sure.

2nd Man. Or some apothecary chap; what's
that

He nurses gingerly on his knees?

Deborah. A bag,
I think.

Saul. Well, if he bring some skill in the bag,
Let him be doctor or apothecary,
Ay, or a barber, it's all one.

Deborah. O row,
Row, you are paddling !

2nd Man. Are they on the mud ?

Saul. They might be plowing for the pace they
make ;
They've backbones weak as reeds.

Deborah. But if they had
A woman in the crew, she'd let them see
What 'tis to have your main strength in your heart :
She would not stop for spraining. O but they're
slow !

[*Saul goes into his cottage.*]

Martin. Do you think yon leech can frighten
with his drugs
The fiend that's with us ? For it is a fiend,
No common smittle fever. I have gone
Into the town lately, and they told me
The whole earth's peoples have been fiercely caught
Like torn small papers in a wind, in this
Great powerful ailing. And I believe God
Has taken health out of the world.

Deborah. Why, then,
We are not the only plagued ones ? And belike
There will be other girls with sweethearts lying
Tormented with the thing, and no help near ?
And you will say God's good !

Martin. I say man's wicked.
And that's enough for me to understand.

A Man. What do they call the sickness ?

Martin. Cholera
The name was in the town ; and that seems like

To mean a kind of anger. But look away
 From what it's called to what the malady is.
 You simpletons, I tell you all again
 God's with us here, God merciless and angry ;
 He has made His blame into a swinking fiend.
 Has she not seen, this woman you call daft,
 Seen him who bears the message, the Lord's blame?
 God has given the world to one of His fiends.

A Man. Well, it may be, but, thank God, here's
 a doctor,
 And he shall have a try at the plague for me.

*[A woman, the mother of Deborah's lover
 David, runs in.]*

The Woman. Deborah, Deborah, come! it's
 terrible with him.

Ah, the poor boy is hurt so, and he's crying,
 Crying for you to come and help his heart.

Deborah. O, he's not dying?

The Woman. Perilous near, I think.
 And now he puts his mother aside and wants
 Only his sweetheart there.

Deborah. Run back to him :
 O he must keep his hold on life ; he must
 Wrestle a little longer ; tell him to think
 Of ease stealing over his limbs, and me
 Smoothing the cruelty out of his mind with love.

The Woman. What, you won't come to him?
 How can he think
 In all that pain? And you won't come?

Deborah. Why, see,
 Here is the doctor coming, here's the boat ;
 I'll stay here till he lands, and get him first.

[She urges David's mother off.]
 You'll let me have him first, won't you, neighbours?
 You'll never make me lose David in death
 By taking the doctor's care yourselves when he's

Just at the utmost need of it? it would
Craze me, I know, if the thing killed David.
You'll let me have the doctor first, neighbours?

The Madwoman. I see a man's life like a little
flame

Clinging to one end of a burning spill;
And the man's in the grasp of a great anger,
Who is for shaking the last glimmer of life
From off him, as you shake the fire off a match
When you would have it done with burning.

One of the Men (hailing the boat). Is he a
doctor?

From the Boat. Ay; a good one too.

Deborah. You have been wickedly slow; we're
all desperate

With waiting; row as if death reacht for you.

From the Boat. The town's all full of doctor's
work.

Martin. It's true.

The life is draining away out of the people.

From the Boat. Are many more down since we
left?

Deborah. O many,

And those that were just taken when you went
Are hanging over the last danger now.

O hurry; I'm to have the doctor first
To tend my David, for he's worst of all.

[*A cry is heard from Saul's cottage.*]

A Woman. Whose bairn is that?

A Man. Saul's little Barnaby.

A Woman. He sounds like nearing death. O,
Saul will rage

If the lad's taken! How can it have
To do with God, this plague, that goes about
The little happy life of Barnaby?

[*Saul comes out of the cottage.*]

Saul. What's hindering those weak fools in the boat?

They can't be rowing still?

The Woman. How is the lad?

Saul. Christ, if he should be going! Are they near?

A Man. Just at the landing. look.

Saul. Let him have skill
To hold my Barnaby back from dying, God!

[*He runs off towards the river (R.).*]

A Man. Now what's he after? Going to lug them in?

A Woman. He's in the water, up to his shoulders nearly!

A Man. He'll swamp them!

Another Woman. What, will he drag the man ashore!

A Man. He'll souse the doctor finely if he does.

A Man. And drown his drugs maybe!

A Woman. Lord, but he takes
The man like a murderer.

A Man. Nay, there's a feat!

A Man. That Saul's a rare strong fellow! No one else

Standing above waist-deep could pick a man

From out a boat like a little parcel, trudge

Through mud and water holding a grown doctor

Above his head with arms stiff straightened out.

A Man. He's got him dry to shore.

A Woman. A biggish chap
He is, and yet Saul made a toy of him.

A Man. Saul seems to pant a bit though.

A Man. Like enough.

[*Saul comes in (R.), the Doctor walking alongside. Saul has hold of him by his arms. They all beset the Doctor.*]

Saul. Straight on, sir : you're mine first. Hands off him, now !

Doctor. Come, come, you're all bewildered ; we must go
Quietly now about this business.

Saul. Ay,
But first you'll go the road I'm taking you,
And that's straight on to my house ; you'll begin there.

Doctor. Then free my arms.

Saul. Push on ; they'll give us room
If we push hard ; it's only noise they make.
Stand back, the lot of you ; out of the way
Deborah : I'll not have him hindered now
By any of you craving skill from him.

*[Throughout this and the following,
Saul, still holding the Doctor
firm, is fighting his way through
the press to his cottage.]*

3rd Man. Saul, Saul, my wife's in agony.

Saul. Leave go.
Let her have patience for a while, or else
Groan, as she pleases ; it's all one to me.
But Barnaby shall have the doctor first.

Doctor. Help me with this wild fellow : hold him off !

3rd Man. Come to my wife, sir, only come and do
Something to quieten her horrible pains ;
That's all I want. O come !

Doctor. I will, if you
Hold off this crazy ruffian.

Saul. Out of the road !
Am I not the strongest framed man in the place ?
My Barnaby shall have some good of that,
Else he might all as well be son to limbs

As weakly strung as yours.

3rd Man.

O listen, sir.

For Jesus' sake listen : all through the night
And all this morning, I have seen my wife,
Whom I would burn for, being slowly killed
With the mere torment—God, you shall come
with me.

Saul. You fool, am I playing a game? Take
this (*strikes him*)

To show you what I mean. crawl out of the way.

Doctor. Stop now. Leave handling me. It's
not for you

To say how I must work.

Saul (*pulling at him*). Come on, come on ;
Or you'll be shouldered like a sack of meal.

Deborah. Saul, I was promised the doctor first,
these folk

All promised him to me—did you not, friends?
For David's hold on life is nigh worn through
With the fierce fretting of the malady ;
Now this man's skill would seize his slipping life
Back to his body again till the stress were done ;
But else he'll die—Saul, my David will die.

[*Others also lay hold of the Doctor.*

Saul. I'll not have this : you, Deborah, stand
away ;

It's your fault if I hurt you. Leave go, all.
You should have been born strong, now is the
time

When a man may be glad of his tough thews.

[*He has at last got the Doctor across
to his cottage (L.) and thrusts him
within, shutting the door on him
and standing against it facing the
crowd.*

In with you, sir ; and if there's any skill

Known that will better this sickness, use it well.
 I'll keep the village off from hampering you.
 Now let you all be quiet awhile and ruled :
 Your brabblement will spoil the doctor's craft.
 I have him and I'll keep him till he's saved
 My Barnaby ; when he has lifted him
 Back into easy breathing, he is yours ;
 But till I have the danger off the boy
 I make not a farthing's toss for shrills and grumbles,
 Let every ache the devil knows of wring
 Your wives, children, and lovers. Now I know
 What good my muscles are. Stand off, women !
 Both kinds of women, keep well out of my reach !

A Man. Let's have him away from there : we
 are enough
 To master Saul, I'm sure.

Another. Yes, rush him down,
 Hustle him out of that.

Another. We've as much right
 As he has to the doctor's cures.

Sau. Ay, have you ?
 Here's my right. (*Picking up an axe from the
 bench.*) What will you say to this ?

Good heavy steel, and an edge to it, and arms
 To make it speak manfully,—these are my rights,
 And Barnaby's rights, to have the doctor first.
 Ay, flinch, you are wise, and cower, and hold your
 tongues,

You'll not talk down this fellow of mine, nor me.
 I warrant I'll graft a conscience on your hearts
 Will hold you fearful and railed off from me,
 As though I did priest's business in a church.

~~As~~ *The Mad-man* (*left alone at the side away
 from Saul's cottage*). They'll shirk to come
 at handgrips with a man

They see bragging himself as good as death ;

And yet they'll all be shrivelled in an hour
 By death they cannot see. Like flies on a heath
 Hiding from wind they are; but there comes
 running

A singeing wild fire through the heather,—yes,
 And they mean to put the death out with some
 drugs,

Could they get past a man playing at death.

[*The woman who is mother of Deborah's
 lover, David, runs in.*]

The Woman. Where's that girl Deborah?

Deborah. Ah, is he worse?

The Woman. What do you care whether he's
 worse or not?

You were to bring me the doctor when he landed,
 But you must have your gossip out before
 You'll stir for David. I've long kept away
 From saying this; now I'll tell you my heart:
 For it is bitter to me, bitter, that he
 Should put his mind on an easy wench like you,
 A doxy who's a tavern-word for freedom,
 And set you in front of me. Ay, now, in his death,
 Off he shrugs his mother's own hands and looks
 Moaning for you, a whim of his blood, to come.

Deborah. Let all this be for now; is David
 worse?

The Woman. His life's just tottering in the
 sickness, like

A candle in the draught of an open door;
 Ay, it's as if his body had been wrenched
 Open, and Death blew in upon his soul.

Deborah. No hope, then?

The Woman. I can hope, for I ~~love~~ ^{love} his mother
 And I have none but him. But if he dies,
 There are always men for a free lass like you.
 Hope? Yes, if now, while he still holds the plague,

Just holds the beast off from his life, he had
The help of a doctor's skill, he would come through.

Deborah. Saul, surely the doctor's done with
Barnaby

By now? Will you not tell him to make haste?

Saul, you've been often very kind to us,

David and me; but you'll do good to yourself

If you save David's life, and save my soul.

Saul. You may stop talking, girl, and bide my
time.

Deborah. But, man, do you know what you are
doing now?

David is on a deadly brink, and you

Shove off his weakening hold,—you murder him

As wickedly now all as you did that.—

Nay, nay, I did not mean any hard words;

I know how madden'd you have been. But now

Barnaby has got healing; only bid

The doctor hurry over the lad's cure,

And give him to me.

Saul.

Not I; I'll have the boy

Tended as leisurely as he were a lord;

The man shan't scamp the least of his drugging,—

Wounds!

I'll pay him queerly if he does.

Deborah.

And you,

What earnings is this work like to bring you?

If David's life is broken off from mine,

What will your wages be? I can tell you.

Some day, out of hiding in your dark flesh,

Your soul will creep like a beast out of a thicket

Into the shadowless light where men see God;

~~And~~ there'll be a hound of anger has been set

To wait for you; and it will fly at you:

You make yourself now game for God's hunting
wrath.

Saul, there's something sacred about lovers.
 God will not easily forget the fault
 Of one who parts those who are fast troth-plight.
 For there is wondrous more than the joy of life
 In lovers ; there's in them God Himself
 Taking great joy to love the life He made :
 We are God's desires more than our own, we
 lovers.

You dare not injure God ! Think on it, Saul !—
 O Saul, let me have David's love ! Dear Saul,
[*She kneels.*]

You must not do such an immortal wrong
 As wrenching my whole life back from its worship,
 Murdering David's children that still sleep
 Within our love. All my body and brain
 Needs David. There's no good for me beside.
 The world would all be round me like an evil
 If David left me : it would come in at the wound
 And make me itself, drench my spirit with
 poison.—

[*She stands up.*]

Curse you, Saul, and curse your Barnaby !
 May it be the lad's death now, may yourself
 Follow him into sickness, but come through
 Alive and blasted by it in your heart,
 All of you turned to a great hunger for sin,
 That will keep you for ever as far apart
 From Barnaby as God's hell is from heaven.

[*The Doctor appears behind Saul in the
 cottage door.*]

Doctor. The lad's in a fair way now.

Saul (gripping him). He will not die?
 Can you tell that for certain? ~~Must you, then,~~
 Don't juggle any sleight of words with me.

Doctor. Come, come, I know my trade. His
 pains are gone,

The fever's slipping out of him. Let go,
Others are needing me.

Saul. But dare you leave him?
Is there no danger between him and health?

Doctor. No, no, his malady's all but finisht now;
For this thing either suddenly turns to death
Or else as suddenly gives up. The boy
Is now as good as well.

Saul. Barnaby's safe?
I need not hold out longer.

Deborah (to the doctor). O sir, make haste.
[*The Doctor goes out surrounded by
Deborah and others. A few remain
with Saul.*]

Saul. My Barnaby will live.—Do you think he
knows?

Did he say for sure that Barnaby would live?

A Man. O ay, he knows. Barnaby's through
it now.

Saul. I was afraid for him, mightily afraid.
What! where's the doctor? Did I let him go?
My God, suppose he's playing a dog-trick on me!
If he has swindled me! Shall I after him?
Ah, but I could not master them again.
He has broken the fear in me, and it was fear
Kept me strung upright, and the mind in me hale
And throng'd with an anger, would have thrasht
you down

If you had dared me. O my spirit stormed
Within me then, I had limbs like a giant's.
But now my will crumbles into failure;
The fear has snapt, I felt it in my brain
~~Snap like a strand~~, and all my life loosen
Because it parted; and I can't mend my fear.
That's strange, isn't it? I can't fear at all.
What made it break, and so unman my heart?

Ah, I remember, Barnaby's going to live.

A Man. What, Saul, man, you are reeling!

Saul. I'm tired out.

For hours it's been with me like riding waves
That reacht higher and higher. They'll drown me
now.

I'm glad you quencht so easily at my temper;
For had it come to a tussle, I dare say
You'd have found me in slack fettle, a breathless
weakling.

The Man. Is it the sickness on you, Saul?

Saul. I think

This body holds more sickness now than Saul.
There are wells of cold pouring out of my heart;
My thought's all black within me. I am earth
Already, save for the business that the plague
Has left itself to do.

The Man. Why, then let's have
The doctor back.

Saul. No, others want him now;
And Barnaby will live.

The Man. He's within hail,
And 'twill be hours before he's through his job.
I'll call him back.

Saul. What good? he said the lad was nearing
health,
Did he not? Yes, I'm sure he said it.

The Man. Ay,
But it's leapt from Barnaby to you; and maybe
Soon it will beat the man to loose its grip.

Saul. Nay, it began last night, and all to-day
I've felt it burrowing deeper in my vitals;
Ay, like claws working within me, ^{tearing}
The roots of my life apart. But there was one
Main sinew was too tough for all its gnawing,
My fear for Barnaby. And now that's given,

The lad will live : in a few days, maybe,
 You'll see him playing ally-com-panny here
 Or football. Yes, he'll take to football first
 When he gets up ; he likes a running game.
 I hope this bout won't set his growth aback.
 O Christ, I'm dizzy : am I standing now ?
 I seem falling and falling endlessly ;
 The air is shouting past me. I ought to pray ;
 But there's no need : Barnaby will live.

[He falls.]

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 Bless the bed that I lie on.

I'm going to swoon, I think. Lads will you try
 To carry me indoors ?—quick, while I have
 Some senses left. I must not go without
 Saying good-bye to Barnaby.

[They carry him into the cottage.]

[A short pause. Deborah rushes in distraught.]

Deborah. Saul, you murderer, you murderer !
 What ? O, it's no good hiding : come out now :
 Let's have no whimpering over Barnaby ;
 You've killed my David ; stand out into the open,
 You and your crime, and let me see you blench
 To feel, at my asking, God take hold of you.

[She sees Saul's axe on the ground, and picks it up.]

His axe ! Saul's dropt his axe ! Why, this is the
 word

For me to give Saul, this is the word I want !

[Battering at Saul's cottage door.]

David has sent a message to you, Saul.

~~Come and~~ take it.

[She stands ready with the axe lifted for striking. One of the men open the door.]

The Man. Saul is dead.

Deborah (staggering). Saul dead?
Who killed him?

The Man. Dead of the plague he is.

Deborah. The plague!
Had Saul the plague?—No, it's afraid he is,
And shamming,—tell him I mean to see him.

The Man. Look there.

Deborah (peering past him). Saul?—Saul?—
Who'd think he'd go so sudden?

[*The axe drops from her hands.*
What fell?—O yes, he's cheated that too, now!—
David, David, I can do nothing for you!

CURTAIN.

ACT II

PERSONS

DEBORAH.

THE MOTHER *of Deborah's lover, David.*

MIRIAM, *David's younger sister.*

BARNABY, *Saul's son, now grown up.*

ACT II

The living room of Deborah's cottage. Doors to bedrooms R. and L.: door into the lane at back. (L.C.)

Deborah by herself, bending over a seaman's chest. She calls into the inner room.

Deborah. Barnaby!

[Barnaby, grown to a young man, comes in from the bedroom.

Your kit's ready now, I think.
You'll need to cord it well: the lock's not good.

Barnaby (as he cords the box). Lucky for me
you had this chest put by;
I've not too many shillings.

Deborah. Yes, 'twas lucky.

Barnaby. You've never told me where it came
from.

Deborah. No?—
(She pauses a moment, then adds quietly) This was
my David's box.—He would have gone,
Too, for a sailor; and I often lookt
To pack this box for him with things he'd need.
I begged it from his mother when he died;
I've nothing else of his.—Well, 'tis yours now.
It's you are off for a sailor now.

Barnaby. ~~Being~~ *(rising from the box).* That's done;
And properly. Try the rope by the knot;
You could nigh fiddle on it.—O, it's queer!
I can scarce think I'm off to see the world.

Deborah. Ay, here's the evening come that I've
watched coming
These many years.

Barnaby. You knew I'd go?

Deborah. O, well!

Barnaby. But you aren't grieved with me?

Deborah. Why should I grieve?
The world's made for young men. And you'll
come back.

There's that, I think, in the village will draw you
home.

Often I'll see you coming through that door
With a fine swagger learnt on foreign quays.

Barnaby. Deborah, if I don't come back——

Deborah. Fie, now,
What sort of talk is this?

Barnaby. But I must say it.—
When in that pestilence my father died,
And I was homeless in the village, you
Took me and housed me. 'Tis so long ago
That I've no mind of it. But no one else,
I know, would have to do with me; the men
Remembered how, to keep the doctor with me,
My father cowed them like a lot of dogs,
Yes, and he with the sickness on him. And the
women

Hated me as the child for whose small life
So many dead were paid.

Deborah. The women! Gulls
Chattering shrilly when the tide is out!
It's true Saul seized the Doctor's skill for you,
Kept it till you were sound. But who's to know
That those the doctor could not save had ~~lived~~
If they'd been tended sooner?

Barnaby. It's nought to me
Whether they lived or died.—But I was there

In the sight of all, a living thing the folk
 Could spend their bitterness on. What matters it
 Whether their bitterness was lies or no?

It's what they said that matters.—

And with their saying they'd have smeared my
 life,

Made me a workhouse boy, had it not been
 For you, Deborah.

Deborah. It's all over now :

No one thinks of it nowadays.

Barnaby. No one

But me—and David's mother.

Deborah. Miriam's mother.

And Miriam takes no heart from her, I think.

Barnaby (breaking in hastily). But you, who'd
 had through me the dearest loss

Of all in the village, you whom my life had robbed
 Of David—O I know the man he was,

I've heard the talk of who remember him—

You took me in and housed me !

Deborah. Barnaby !

Let be !

Barnaby. I must not let it be. For years
 I've taken all your love as, I suppose,
 Rich folks eat bread—without thanks or a thought
 For what was nourishing me.

Deborah. There needed none.

Barnaby. And now—you give me David's box !

Deborah. Who else

Should have it ?

Barnaby. I did not know it was his.

Deborah. What then ?

Barnaby. O Deborah, dare you give it me ?

Is it only a small thing to you, this

That once was David's ? If he saw you now !

If David saw you giving me, who brought

Death between you and him, this last small thing !

Deborah. No more, Barnaby !—You must take the box ;

It means something to me.—And now I'll say
What I, too, have kept hid for many years,
Hid even from myself. While you were growing,
Our hearts quietly drew our minds to be,
Almost at unawares, brother and sister.
Now you are grown, and now to-night you are off
For the great seas of the world and a man's
adventure ;—

And now, Barnaby—you are my son.—
Let that be the full quittance in your thought
Of what I've done for you. Into my life
You came terribly : I dare think I'd have
More right to claim you than your mother's pangs,
You were such an anguish to me. Yes, and I
Died then, save for a husk of living, still
Fastened about the soul perisht within me.
But now the hidden senses in my soul
Are nursed out of their dreadful grave of winter,
As rains nurse in the earth the buried plenty ;
And you have put in me the power of life
Again, like a new season in the world,
You, and the joy you're bringing me.—It's well,
Maybe, we are not used to have our speech
Deal with such things as these : but is there not,
Now that your going's brought us to the mood,
Somewhat besides within you, you should tell me?

Barnaby (uneasy). I? I've said what I had to say.—But now

I must go see some friends before I start.

Deborah. Yes, that you must : I will ~~wait~~ here for you.

Barnaby (to himself as he goes). Time I was going for a sailor indeed.

[*Barnaby goes through the door to the lane. Deborah remains, looking at the box.*]

Deborah. He should have told me; but I know 'tis so;

I know how it is with him and Miriam,—
David's sister! O I was wrencht at first!
Cruel it was to see the signs of their love
At first: but now—am I wronging you now,
David, my David, to feel life so strong,
To be so glad that life is in my heart,
And you there in the grave? Down there so long,
My beautiful David, and the stones between us!
And I walking over you with a heart
Sweet with life!—But ageing, ageing slowly.

[*A knock at the outer door and David's mother comes in. She is now an old woman.*]

David's Mother. They tell me Barnaby sets out to-night.

Deborah. They told you truth.

The Mother. And you'll be lonely then?

Deborah. Why, not so lonely. Miriam will come

Often, and talk with me of Barnaby.

Mother. Miriam's my daughter, and I'll have her mind

When once she's free from the lad's looks.

Deborah. Ay, will you?

You know, then? But you will not poison her.

Mother. Poison? Yes, if the truth be poison, as it must be to some folks, poison and shame.—

Ah! ~~here~~ will be Barnaby's box now, I dare say.

(*She looks close at the box*). Why, this is it! I guesst this! This is why

I came here.

Deborah. I was wondering why you came.

Mother. Miriam told me, you had found a box
Put by, would do for Barnaby. And I,
In the instant of her words, was very sure
The box would be this that was David's once.
O it's a queer thing you should be so faithless !
But you shall have the truth now, Deborah :
And if it makes your blood burn, if it makes
The woman in you grieve like an inmost pain,
It's you are the shame, you are the poison, not
The truth I'm giving you.

Deborah. It will be well
To have this out now: it must come some time.

Mother. Well, is it? And is this well, this last
thing
You've done to David? Give his box away
To the boy for whom David's life was murder'd !
O yes, I know it's not the worst you've done ;
And I've stood by and watched you, these long
years,

Wronging my son, whose living heart was all
Yours, but dead is mine only, all mine !

Deborah. I never wronged your son.

Mother. Never? O, wait !
You'll see yourself at last now as you are,
For this has fetched me out of bitter silence.
After the plague was done, and David earthed,
And when you came making your cry to me,
You forged your words so clever, I could not help
But give you this for keepsake, David's box,—
His father's, too, before him. It had been yours,
You said, to pack against his voyages.
And see who has it now ! Now whose voyage
Have you been careful of, whose? Barnaby's !
The child of wicked Saul, who let my David
Die that his brat might steal the doctor's skill !

This is not such a little thing: it is
A great and dreadful thing, because it tops
So much—Girl! do you not feel guilty?

Deborah. No.

Mother. It's a strange wonder. You watch
Barnaby,

Grown to the height almost that David had,
Living here in your house as though he were
Your own blood, and you never wince as if fire
Fell on your skin, to think who was driven
down

Out of the life he made so much of, ay,
Out of your life and mine, by Barnaby.
O, I have been patient, Deborah; my God,
I've had good need to be patient, seeing you,
The one who, after me, should have kept pure
David's memory, using him this way,
Fostering Barnaby! I hope the souls
See when they've gone through death, that David
now

May know what faith his sweetheart keeps for
him,—

Housing the boy who was his death!—and
know

At last, his mother is the faithful one.

Deborah. O, David sees us now, be you well
sure.

Mother. And does he see, think you, this
Barnaby

Trapping the heart of his sister?

Deborah. Ay, at last

We've come to it.

Mother. Indeed we've come to it.
You know, do you, Barnaby's drawn the girl,
My Miriam, into his wiles?

Deborah. She loves him.

Mother. She does not. How could she, 'David's sister, love Barnaby? 'Tis but his looks have seized her mind.

Deborah. And do you mean to put yourself against These two lives that are bound to love each other?

Mother. O, this is handsome talk! And I suppose
It pleases you—it will be how you keep
Your love for David still alight within you—
To think of these two coming into love.

Deborah. Pleases me? No; the word's too small.

Mother. And this
The horriblemest thing a dreaming fever could
Devise to sicken your heart! I'd rather have
The girl caught by a town-scamp, and made
game of,
Than to fall in with Barnaby. Why, that
Would be as if she helpt in David's death;
Her love would be growing out of David's grave!

Deborah. We can't look back so far: these two
must have
Their need of life; and life must still fare on
As it were burning the past things in gladness.

Mother. Gladness for you, mayhap: but not
for me;
I still am thinking on my dead David.

Deborah. But if you will not reckon as I do
These matters, you will gall and break yourself,
Striving with what is not to be striven down.

Mother. Not myself but this wicked love I'll
break,—
If love's already upon them.

Deborah. And it is;
You know it is.

Mother. My God, I do : and I know
You're mightily glad of it,—David's sweetheart !
Deborah. You shall listen to me. I think I
could

Never persuade your mind that it should know
How life went through me, every living moment
Making my body feel as the air must feel
When a song takes it,—how I thrilled to life
In those gone days of David loving me.—
And when I came to myself and was no longer
Senseless, after they had buried David,
I was all sealed away from the health of life ;
And through my misery only came the throb
Of a huge force of pain. And then I saw
You village folk meaning to turn your grief
To malice put on that young helpless boy,
Barnaby. I stopt that ; and, to be true,
Then I knew nothing why I gave the lad
My hearth. Blindly I did it ; but it was
The life in me desiring joy again,
And, unknown to itself, making a way
Out of sorrow.

Mother. Ay, that's your wickedness,
Not to be sorry for your David dead
Through all your time.

Deborah. And vex him with my grief?—
I know the strength of sorrow ; but I know,
Even I know, who have such need of death,
What life can do against its sorrow, how
Lovely in gladness life can be : I have
Great joy in living now, knowing these two
Love as I loved my David.—This house lies
So close to the marsh, that I must always have
The quiet sounds in my ears the quags and pools
Whimper at night, as though the darkness were
A pain to itself ; and often as I would sit

To grieve before my fire, aching within,
All wound and rankle, I would seem to be
Life shut in its narrow nature ; and outside,
Surrounding me, the sighing, crying marsh
Was sorrow and darkness always calling to life.—
Then I began to take young Barnaby
Into my mind, and feel him dear to me.

Mother. O shameless, shameless ! Listen to
her, David !

Deborah. He's listening ; and he knows I hear
the marsh

Still calling ; but my heart is strong against it.
For now in the life I know, love once more
Begins—in Barnaby and Miriam !
It begins, and it shakes off the calling sorrow.
And you—you will hinder it ! This life of ours,
That can fight down all the terrible strength
Of misery coming wild and fierce against it ;
And, like a kindled thing, goes on in joy,
Leaving the bitter spite of all its wrong
Behind it, as a flame leaves empty ashes,—
This life you'll manage like a broken horse,
And drive with a few words in the little road
Your fanciful notions take ! No, you will not.
I care not what you make of me, for I
Go on now trusting in the life I know ;
I trust it to be in me a strong heart.
And I'll not spend my breath in pleading with you
For these two children, to be kind with them.
But I'll do this : I'll warn you, not to risk
What scant frail happiness you have, in hope
To match your will against the power of life
When it means making glory of love again.

*[Miriam comes in hastily with an air
of trouble.]*

Deborah. Miriam !

Mother. Miriam! you here in this house?

Miriam (to Deborah). Where's Barnaby? Where is he, Deborah?

He has not gone? I will not let him go
Without some speech with me.

Deborah. What have you done?
Miriam, why do you look afeared? Is this
Some quarrel you and Barnaby have made?
You've never let a whim of anger sting
Your minds, just at the hour of his leaving you?

Miriam. But he's not gone? I cannot have
him go
Not saying a word.

Mother. You will not let him go?
What do you want with words from Barnaby?

Miriam. O you know nothing, nothing of
this: I came
For Deborah.

Mother. It must be hidden then
From your own mother? There is like to be
Something shameful in this.

Deborah. Some folly, I think:
To sour your first parting with a quarrel!

Miriam. But I've been waiting, hearkening all
day
For him to whistle his curlew-cry without
That tells me he is there, ready for me.

Mother. Ho, now we know the trick: the fool
I have been!

Deborah. What! What is this? Barnaby went
from here
A moment since to find you.

Miriam. He did not come.

Deborah. Then you'll have missed him. But
look, there's his box:

He must come back for that before he starts.
You shall stay here, and mend this foolishness ;
He cannot be long away, you not to be found.

Mother. Now this is mine ; I have the say here
now.

Miriam, you shall take your road with me
Back to the house. Barnaby's nought to you,
And from this hour you'll hear no pretty curlews
Crying you to put by your maidenhood.

Miriam. O God, she knows ! I did not think
she knew !

*[She falls on her knees at the table with
face in arms. A short pause
follows Miriam's cry.]*

Mother. I was looking for this ; I knew we'd
find

Some shameful thing. We've had enough of words ;
With me now, girl !

Deborah. You must not go with her,
You must not ! Miriam, tell her she mistakes,
Fearfully mistakes you ; and maybe then
She'll let you stay here.—What ! have you no
words,

Nothing to answer her ? Do you not guess
What a vile thing her mind is making of you ?

Mother. You'd have her face me with some
hardy show ?

Let her weep and be ashamed. But hear me,
you *(to Miriam)*,

If you stay here for Barnaby, you'll stay
Out of my house forever.—God, my daughter
A boy's wanton ! Your fine work, Deborah !
Tis' this has gladdened you, and made you shift
The sorrow you so talk of, and love life ;
This is what David died for ! An eye-sweet thing !
A spice for all the blab-tongues on the river !

Deborah. Have no heed for her, Miriam, but trust me.

Poor lass! your little quarrel is so sore on you
Her talk goes past you. But we'll make it nothing;
Stay for Barnaby, and you'll laugh at this.

Mother. I have no time for whiling here; come now,

Now with me home, or never try again
The door of my house or the door of my heart.

Deborah. Miriam, I know Barnaby's mind: stay here.

*[Barnaby comes in, but stands doubtful
a short way from the door.]*

Mother. So here's your boy; and now you make your choice,

And it's for ever. You will get no good
From him; his father's wicked blood is all
Too strong within him; and it is he who brought
Misery on us, and poverty so hard
That we've been beggars in the village often,
Beggars for food many a bitter day.
He killed David: put that in your heart
Beside the folly that you've played with him.
He's made my heart sick to be sending life
Still through my brain. Now choose if he's your
lover.

Deborah. Miriam, it's for you to speak.

Miriam (looking up).

Barnaby!—

[A brief pause.]

Mother (breaking into lament). I am alone now!

I am alone with my age!

Nothing is left me out of all my years,
Nothing but grieving. Long ago they killed
My son, and now my daughter turns on me
And joins with them who've been so wicked to me.
I'll never heal of this: nothing but grieving!

O Christ, I am too old ; I should be gone.

[*She shuffles through the outer door.*

Miriam (*rising to her feet*). Barnaby ! Barnaby !

What have I done ?

Deborah. We'll have some quiet now. And now, you children,

See if we do not set this quarrel straight.

Miriam. I say it is no quarrel ; but for three days, Three days, he has been careful to keep far From seeing me.

Deborah. For three days ! but this comes Like thunder on me. Three days !—Barnaby ! What holds your tongue ?

Miriam. And it's worse than I dared Even to think ! for I did think he'd have Some hard word to give me ; but here's nothing. Surely I am to blame ; but he says nothing ; And I, Deborah, I'm nothing to him !— O Deborah, make him speak to me.

Deborah. You must, Barnaby, you must speak. Do you not see It's dreadful, you not saying a word, and standing There with your grounded looks ? Why are you sullen ?

Barnaby. I would have done without this.

Miriam. O, to me ! Not to yourself, as though your eyes took shame To find me ; but say out to me the thing That makes you strange against me. I am strong ; You need not think of tears : I am past tears.— Barnaby, you are leaving me to-night !

Barnaby. Ay ; and it had been better if you'd stayed From catching at my going.

Deborah. But, O dear God, What does it all mean ? What is in your mind

Barnaby. Well ; you will have it then ?—It's not my fault ;

Nor yours, Miriam. It just had to be.

Deborah. What is it ? What is it ?

Barnaby. I'd liever have gone off
Without coming to this——

Miriam. What have I done ?

Barnaby. Why, nothing.—It's a troublesome thing to say,

A troublesome thing to know rightly the work
My mind's been making in me.—But I know this,
Miriam : I must clean go from you to-night ;
And from to-night on,—you must be done with me.

Miriam. You're going for a good while ?

Barnaby. For good and all.

Miriam. What does he say, Deborah ? Sure I have

Some faintness on me, and it hurts my hearing.

Deborah. You will get used to this. 'Tis how things go

Here in the world. You trusted in your life,
Did you not ? Ay, you trusted there was joy
To carry you through life. This is what falls
To those who trust so.—But it cannot be ;
The old despair cannot be coming down
On me again. Now, not for the love of me,
Barnaby, but for the love of God, say out
What it is truly we two women must
Look for at your hands now.

Barnaby. Have I not said it ?—

(*With sudden impatience*) It's all too small for me
here : it's all cramp't,

A misery of little drudging work,
With now and then some fair risk of a danger
Out on the river ; and that's the one fine thing
In this half-smothered life. And what comes then,

When we are through the danger, with a breath
That's all sharp tingling from it? Back we come,
A penny or two in our pockets maybe, back
To this—what shall I call it? ay, a kennel,
A kennel made of mud, this penn'd village,
This knab of dirt between river and marsh.
But I'll fling free. I'll not keep stifling here.
Out in the world there's China and the Indies,
Lands they speak of wonderfully, and capes
That ask a month of storming to get round;
All the great life of sailors, as I've heard
The pilots tell of, they who bring to dock
And through our shoals the ships that trade in the
East.

And what's the best for me if I stay here?
Grow to a pilot's wisdom, maybe; climb
In the half-light the sides of vessels, stained
With pushing through the salty weather of seas
Where the sun makes the waters burn like stone
That floors a furnace; and have some snatch of
talk

With them who live what I must dream, as men
Visit a cripple bedrid in a room.

Deborah. I know all this; I have long seen it
growing,

And there's no harm in it. And is this all
The reason for your cruelty,—your want
To go a-vagabonding with the sailors?

Barnaby. No, 'tis not all; but it is all my words
Can fashion of the mind in me. That life
Which leaps so keen awake within my brain
When, like a hatred that has been in hiding,
Danger blows on the fishing fleet, and we
Must fight to win ashore, that power of life
Is what has taken a strong hold on me.
I must go out and let it spend itself

Somewhere—somehow—I don't know rightly ; yet
This is plain as a candle-flame in darkness,—
I'm to have done with being hampered here.

Deborah. And this girl—why should you not
come back to her,
When you have seen the world ?

Barnaby. Well, I've myself
To please about that first. I'll not be made
A mammet for you women to play games with.

Deborah. I understand your meaning now.
You've done
The wicked thing by her.

Barnaby. And what did she
But please her own mind in it ?

Miriam. O God ! God !

Deborah. Why, you should smile when you drink
gall, Miriam,
For there's nought else your soul will drink of life.

Barnaby. O, but it's not so easy for me to leave
her !

A deal of comfort calls me here ; and she
Keeps all of it,—she's all the little close
Sweetness of comfortable wonted life
Which would grip firm about me ; and it's that—
That is the thing I must be cruel with,
And to myself, too, I must be cruel.

Deborah. And you care nought for what may
happen to her ?

Barnaby. And what should happen to her ?—
what should happen ?

[*Deborah looks steadily at Barnaby.*]

Barnaby. Deborah, leave us a moment.

[*Deborah goes into the inner room.*]

I suppose
That you've let on about our foolishness ?

Miriam. Foolishness ! It was sacred to me.

Barnaby. Leave that,
And tell me. Is there aught like to come of it?

Miriam. And if there was, what would it mean
to you?

Barnaby. Why—why, I think—I should come
back to you.

Miriam. You may go with an easy mind then. No,
There's nothing like to come of it—nothing.

Barnaby. Well, the boat's waiting at the jetty
now

To row me and my traps up to the dock——

*[He hesitates a moment, then suddenly
picks up his box, shoulders it, and
makes off through the door into the
lane.]*

Deborah (coming in from the bedroom). He's
gone?

Miriam. Gone.

Deborah. And I thought my ears surely lied to
me, when

They heard the door latch. And he's gone!

Miriam. Deborah! He has left me, Deborah!

Deborah. And David loved her so, she but a
bairn!—

Saul and Barnaby! David and his sister!

Miriam. Deborah!—I am with child.

CURTAIN.

ACT III

PERSONS

DEBORAH.

MIRIAM.

AN OLD WOMAN OF THE VILLAGE.

BARNABY.

ACT III

The living room in Deborah's cottage. Night: a ship's lamp burning. There is the sound of a wind outside. Deborah and a Midwife, an old woman of the village.

Old Woman. That was a cry of wind! You'd think the night

Was a thing living, when it cries like that:

Sure it's some anger breaking out in the world,

Such wildness of the air skirling aloud.

Do you never fear for staving of your windows?

Deborah. They need good hasps: we get the strength of it here.

Old Woman. Ay, you must be the first thing for the wind

To seize after its crossing of the marsh,

Where nothing stands at all.

Deborah.

And I think often

The wind comes out of the open marsh a spirit

Raving to find naught, all those empty miles,

To throw itself against, and feeling only

Its own rage in the air. But when it lights

Upon these walls, then there's glee in the wind:

Then sowse it hurls on us its whole weight of speed,

And there'll be yells and bullying at the door,

And a din aloft like devils blowing trumpets;

And then 'twill fall to hissing round the eaves

And fumbling at the thatch for a way in;

While seemingly, for a blood-beat or two,

The merciless onward-thronging power of life
 With which God fills the places of the earth,—
 Helpless, all overcome in my desires,
 And trodden down by that main storm of life,
 Am I, when the wind is pouring over me.

[*The Old Woman comes in from the bedroom.*

Old Woman. We'll have a fearful night with
 her, I doubt.

Deborah. Has the wind roused her?

Old Woman. It has stirred her sleep
 So, that she tosses in a sobbing dream,
 And mutters of the hounds baying far-off,
 And casting round to find her baby's soul.
 She will wake soon; and then we'll have some
 work.

Deborah. O, if it had been a living child, I think
 Miriam might have lifted up her heart,
 That now is gone so low.

Old Woman. 'Twas bound to die,
 Her bairn. She chose a bad year for her childing.
 You, a maid-woman, little know these things;
 But this is what we call a seventh year.

Deborah. How seventh?

Old Woman. In the wild countries
 of the world,
 The bears and tigers whelp their little ones
 Every seven years; and then,
 all the twelve months that the beasts are
 ring,
 have cruel childbeds; and the bairns
 like to die.

I hate these tales.
 of evil without them
 n corners of it with fear.
 ell, I know; I had a seventh.

She died 'before I got my feet again.

Deborah. Here's Miriam now with a mind like
blown burning,

Tortured so by one of these wicked tales.

Old Woman. The Gabriel Hounds?

Deborah. I wish I knew the fool—

A woman sure enough—who first would make

The calling of wild geese in the night-wind

A pack of hounds yelping after the souls

Of stillborn babies and unchristened men.

Old Woman. How if 'twere mother Eve? And
are you sure

They're only wild geese? I believe 'tis hounds,—
Gabriel Hounds.

Deborah. Ay, coursing souls, no doubt.

Old Woman. They do hold something mighty
hot in chase;

You may tell that from the fierce way they bark.

Deborah. The fools we women are!

Old Woman. That was not wind!

That was a hound's tongue! Deborah, you heard?

The beagles out of hell are loose in the wind,

The Gabriel Hounds are running wild to-night!

O, now, God rest the little one's soul: he died

Unchristened, and the Gabriel Hounds are out!

Here we two sit and warm us at the fire,

And yonder in the darkness and the wind

The little soul of Miriam's stillborn child

Runs crying from the mouths of the Gabriel
Hounds!

Deborah. I heard it: the sharp horning of wild
geese

On their night-journey. O, it matters not

Whether 'tis geese or Gabriel Hounds indeed;

'Tis hounds, the beagles of hell, to Miriam.

And they are preying after her child's soul,

Chasing his naked spirit down the wind
And famishing to have him in their greed.
God, let her sleep !

Old Woman. Again ! the yelping falls
Through the wind's rushing like a stone through
water.

Deborah. Ay, 'tis fearfully clear.

Old Woman. And hark again !
The night above us must be full of the fiends.

Deborah. I've seen me listening on blowy nights
All the dark hours to the Gabriel Hounds
Yelping and yelping over me. My heart,
If they were really hounds chasing a soul !

[*The door of the bedroom (R.) suddenly
flings open and Miriam, wearing
a nightdress, totters into the room.*]

Deborah. Christ, she has heard them !

Old Woman. Now the work begins.

Miriam. How long have the Gabriel Hounds
been calling ?

Old Woman. What ?
Gabriel Hounds ? Honey, there's no such thing ;
There's naught but a sounding wind at work in
the night.

Miriam. Deborah, you won't lie to me ? How
long
Have they been running in the air and baying ?

Deborah. 'Tis only flights of geese.

Miriam. All lies, all lies !
Everyone in the world lies !

Old Woman. You'll catch cold ;
Come to your bed.

Miriam. What should I do in bed,
You fool, when that hounding rings in the night ?
O what a wind to perish a baby's soul !
But I can't hear the hounds ; was it all dream ?

Deborah. A silly dream, indeed; there's only wind.

Miriam. No! O, they will lie forever! There they sound!

And there's a hunger on them, a yelping hunger;
They have a soul in sight, and they're close to him, close.

And there! a scream came shrilling through their cries;

Was it not like the fear of a baby's soul?

Let me out, Deborah, let me out, to see

What soul the Gabriel Hounds will tear to-night?

The whole night's fell with the hunting of a soul.

Deborah. Dear lass——

Miriam. The door! there's trying at the door!

Old Woman. Only the pushing wind.

Deborah. Who'd be at the door?

Miriam (low). It will be the huntsman of the Gabriel Hounds.

Deborah. Why should he come in here?

Miriam. Not coming in,

Not coming in, but guarding my way out,

Lest I should save my baby's soul from his hounds.

Old Woman. Well, someone's coming in.

[*The outer door is seen to be slowly opening.*]

Miriam. Ay, it's the huntsman!

He knows I mean to save my baby; now

He's coming to destroy me, that his hounds

May run my baby down and feed on him.

You'll help me against him, Deborah?—Ah, no!

'Tis not the huntsman; 'tis a living man.

[*The outer door has been blown wide open by a gust of wind and Barnaby comes in painfully, as infirm. Deborah stares at him in amaze. The Old Woman has her arm round Miriam.*]

Barnaby. Miriam!—

Miriam, what ails you?

Miriam. Have you come through the night?

Barnaby. For you I have come, Miriam.

Deborah. Ay, out of the wind!

Miriam. And did you scan the wind, as you came through?

Barnaby. You cannot tell what fearful things have fought

Against me in the wind. Look, I am trembling;
I am like ridden down under their noises.

— *Miriam.* What are your fearful things? Hounds?
Were they black hounds

With mouths frothing white flame and drawing it
After them, like loose rags of fiery manes
Seized by the wind?

Barnaby. Hounds? No, there were no hounds;
'Twas a man's voice I heard, a man who's dead.—
Shut the door, Deborah; keep out that dreadful
wind.

[*Deborah mechanically does his bidding.*

Deborah (as she comes from the door). Out of
the wind you have come back to us!

Barnaby. And broken I come back to you,
Deborah;

And to you, Miriam. Have you no good word
To comfort me? I tell you I am sick;
You cannot see it on me, for it is
My mind is wounded. You must care for me,
Miriam.

Miriam. Are you sure there were no hounds?

Barnaby. What does she mean?

Miriam. 'Tis Gabriel Hounds I mean.
Would you be looking up into the wind
As you came near the house? They'd be, most
like,

Nosing[~] round and around, with their great heads
 Stoopt close to where their feet made floor of the
 air ;

Or maybe coming at a skeltering pace
 With lifted heads baying along the wind.
 Ay, you would hear them if you did not see them.
 You did not hear their tongues ?

Deborah. Answer her.

Barnaby. No.

Miriam. Nor see somewhere a little cowering
 soul ?

Nor hear a whimpering like a frighten'd baby ?

Barnaby. No, no.

Miriam. Then for a while he must be safe.
 Hold me now ; my senses all are fainting.

*[They are supporting Miriam into the
 bedroom.]*

Barnaby. Miriam !—Don't take her from me,
Deborah.

I am broken, Miriam, the spirit in me
 Is a hurt thing, a cowering hurt thing.—
 O let her listen to me, let her listen !

*[Deborah and the Old Woman have led
 Miriam off. Deborah returns at
 once.]*

Deborah. You must not stay here. We've ado
 enough

Without you coming back. Why come you back ?

Barnaby. Miriam did not know me, Deborah !
 You would not let me tell her all my need.

Deborah. Why come you back ?

Barnaby. For Miriam, I say.
 What is it so strangely ails her ?

Deborah. She had a child.

Barnaby. A child ! A child of mine ? It cannot
 have been

My child.

Deborah. You beast !—Yes, Sir, a child of yours.

Barnaby. O, no !—Am I to believe this ?

Deborah. Even now

You saw her and the horror in her eyes :

What's her mind doing with the Gabriel Hounds

But making them fill the wind with their loud
hunger

For her stillborn unchristen'd baby's soul ?

Barnaby. God help me ! Can I get forgiveness
from her ?

Deborah. O the guilt is not all yours, Barnaby,
Nor half of it yours. I have made this evil
That is devouring Miriam's spirit alive.
I was the one, I thought, when David died,
Who would find life a poison of anguish ; now
Trying to make a health of life through you,
I've made it strike into Miriam's heart.
Now David sees the sister he so loved
Caught into madness and pain fasten'd to her
For all the days she'll have. And it is I thrust
The madness and the pain upon her soul,
I whom he also loved, and might have trusted ! . . .
Hark at that wind ! the whining joy it has
To harm what stands against it, is a sound
Terrible now to me ; it's life in the world.
But fearfuller shouting even than that in the
wind

Miriam hears : she hears the tongues of hell.

Here are enough bad things, without her finding
You in the house. You shall go out from here.

Barnaby. You must not turn me out ; not into
the wind,

Deborah ; don't make me face the wind again.

Deborah. You fear the wind ? You who have
given the wind

A voice to hound Miriam into madness,
And to my heart a meaning like a sword?

Barnaby. I've done nothing wrong to you,
Deborah.

Deborah. You have made life an utter evil to
me.

*[Barnaby sinks on a chair and covers
his face.]*

Barnaby! Barnaby! O, are you crying?
Have I made you cry?

Barnaby. It was your doing;
I felt you wishing me to love the girl.

Deborah. Stand up now; you are not the one
to weep.

You must go now the way you came, and quickly.

Barnaby. I will not go into the wind again.
Do you know what I hear in the wind? A man,
With the ribs of his breast crusht like a trodden
hamper,

Lying three days crampt in a boat, and thirst
Terrible on him, and he for ever groaning;
Through the great noise of wind and spiting waves
That drench his wounded skin with brine, groaning
All the cold days and nights until at last
He dies; and hastily we pitch him out,
Then curse ourselves for throwing food away.
And still his torment frightens me in the wind;
Under the shrill of it, my ears still have him
Panting his cruel breath: he keeps on groaning.

Deborah. We've heard nothing of this. When
were you wreckt?

Barnaby. I cannot tell you that. I was clean
crazed

When the steamer found us. I'm the only one
Come through alive; and it's haunted I am,
Haunted asleep, and when the wind is up,

Fearfully haunted. It falls on me again
All in a throng : the sails blow out like guns,
And like a noise of fiercely burning sticks
The rigging slats ; and then the ship lies smother'd
Under the mainmast cropt off at the deck
As if it were a thistle ; and, pinn'd beneath it,
The mate screams sharp and thin through the
yelling gale.

And then—who knows how many starving days
Of cold, hunger, and thirst, in an open boat ?
'Tis those days haunt me, & all those days of
starving ;

They keep awfully driving through my brain
Round and round, like swinging speed of wheels. . . .
I was carried to hospital, and there
It must have been for weeks they kept me lying.
They say I'm mended now as much as may be.
But they don't know of Miriam. She will cure me ;
She'll quench this frantic work that fills my brain.
With her beside me I might sleep, and not
Always be starting upright from my bed,
Bitten by stinging agony of dreams.

Deborah. Now God forgive me ! Am I glad of
this ?

No, no ; not glad. And yet a kind of ease—
God pardon it—makes way upon my heart,
Now that I see you here so pitiable.
You and the mastery life had in you
Twice to destroy my spirit and break my heart,
You come to wreck, makes me strangely quiet !
Like, when the river's rough with snatch of squall,
The pour of the tide incoming from the sea
Forces a smoothness on the choppy water.—
You bring me the work of what is stronger than
life !

[*The calling of wild geese is heard.*

Quiet, said I?—This is but half done yet :
There's Miriam still, and the Gabriel Hounds !
They sound again. You must not cumber us,
Nor must her mind be hurt with seeing you.
Barnaby, you can't lodge with us to-night.

[She goes to the outer door and sets it open, waiting for him to go through.]

Barnaby. But the wind's worse than ever ! No,
Deborah,
You shall not put me into its power again.

[The wild geese call again.]

Deborah. Come, gather your wits ; Miriam's
first with me.

Barnaby. You don't know what the doctor
warned me of ;
'Tis your mind's wounded, says he, not your body ;
You take good care of being distrest and frighten'd.
Those were his own words.

Deborah. I say, Miriam's first.
The mastery here is ours, I think ; you've come
To the wrong house for tenderness.

Barnaby. But the mate !
He's waiting out there, he and his groaning breath,
Waiting to creep behind me and groan in my ears.
Not into the night, Deborah, the night that's full
Of terrible windy noises !

[The wild geese call again. Miriam is heard crying out from the bedroom.]

Deborah. Now no more !
How should your cowardice move me ? Am I
To pit my woman's force against you ? Quick :
The door's been open long enough ; the hounds
Call fearfully through it.

[The door of the bedroom suddenly opens and Miriam appears struggling with the Old Woman.]

Old Woman. I cannot hold her.

Barnaby. Miriam, I've come back to you, and she's

For driving me out again. Say you want me!

Miriam. They're baying after him again: the Hounds,

The Gabriel Hounds are murdering my baby.

Deborah. Quick, Barnaby! Go before she knows you.

Old Woman. God save you, you've the door wide open on us!

Close it, and come and help me: she's gone wild. We'll have her running into the midst of the marsh, And that's sheer drowning on a night like this.

Deborah (as she helps the Old Woman to hold Miriam). Close the door, Barnaby: what keeps you there

So stupid?

Barnaby. I durst not go too nigh the door.

But let me face her: she can't help but know me.

Miriam, here am I, Barnaby, come for you!

Miriam. Are you all deaf? I should think a viper'd hear

The way they're yelping and the way he screams.

Leave go! I must be there to put myself

Between those ravening hounds and my child's soul.

O, Deborah, leave go, leave go! They must Have nearly run him down.

Old Woman. What could you do If you went out? It's in the air they run.

Miriam. Perhaps I'd draw them after me, and let His frighten'd soul hide somewhere in the dark.

O, I'm not feared of the Gabriel Hounds, but he Is shrieking from them.

Deborah (to Barnaby). Can you not shut the door?

Barnaby. He's there! Behind the door-post there he waits,

The man that haunts me with his dying voice.

Miriam (she stops striving to free herself). Don't keep me fast in the house, Deborah!

Let me just try to draw the hounds away

From chasing, chasing the starved little soul:

They'll easily lose him in such a black wind.

O surely you hear him crying out his terror!

He's all alone, and the hounds after him;

What should I do, his mother, listening here

To him hunted along the wind?—Again

They yelp! Then they've not caught him yet, the hounds!

And I know their lips are grinning from their teeth
Fiendishly in their rage of hunger.

[She begins fiercely struggling again.]

I'll kill you if you will not loose me.

You there, you man, whoever you be,

Find me a knife and put it in my hands.

There's a soul out there, a baby's soul,

The Gabriel Hounds are hunting through the wind;

You may hear them baying, and they're fearfully

Close on their prey; and it's a baby's soul.

I knew him alive beneath my heart

But dead I brought him into the world,

And God cares nothing for his soul.

And now he's alone with night and wind

And the Gabriel Hounds——

[She suddenly breaks free and runs through the outer door. Deborah and the Old Woman follow her.]

Old Woman (as she goes). She's making for the marsh; we'll never catch her.

[Barnaby gazes stupidly through the open door into the windy darkness. There follows a pause of silence. Then the Old Woman comes back alone.]

Old Woman. She's gone.
Straight for the middle of the marsh she made ;
No living hand could save her. O, she ran
So swift, and calling as she went out loud,
Bent almost double for the strength of wind,
I could not have believed the like. My breath
Is almost blown out of my poor body !
Pray God Deborah's got some brandy here.
Poor lass ! her path would take her right to the
 worst
And deadliest quaking mire of the whole marsh ;
'Twould swallow her before she knew her feet
Had lost firm ground.—Why is not Deborah back ?
If the mire stifles her, she's but herself
To blame ; no living hand could save the girl.

CURTAIN.

*The acting rights are the exclusive property
of the Author.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

INTERLUDES AND POEMS

Crown 8vo. 5s. net

SOME OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

The Times.—"Mr Abercrombie has power and he has originality. His mind is fearless, rebellious, sinister. He quails at nothing, lightheartedly frolicking among the most tremendous ideas and emotions. His words pour hot from his pen. . . . 'The power and originality are beyond question. . . . A remarkable work, and we shall look with peculiar anticipation for its successor.'"

Mr EDWARD THOMAS in *Daily Chronicle*.—"There is only one English dramatist who has gone beyond this poet in making blank verse, the march or leap or stagger or crawl or hesitation of the syllables correspond to varying emotions with thrilling delicacy. . . . Any half-dozen lines in his book will prove Mr Abercrombie a poet. Almost any half-dozen will prove him a new poet. . . . A man with a noble and exquisite sense of words and rhythms, with a fine pictorial power kept in its due place in a large attitude towards all life, bold, energetic, nervous, having an artist's harmony of sensual and spiritual life, Mr Abercrombie must move to things beyond the grandeur and subtlety of this book."

Mr JOHN MASEFIELD in *Daily News*.—" 'Blind' is a very fine poem. . . . Mr Abercrombie writes with a delicacy and insight truly poetical. . . . The play is a fine and touching tragedy."

Westminster Gazette.—"The perusal of 'Interludes and Poems' leaves us fascinated. Here is obviously a very considerable poet. The poem 'Blind' reveals a remarkable dramatic quality."

E. H. L. in *Manchester Guardian*.—"The virility and directness of style and thought, the ample, freshly coloured imagination that suggests and illuminates, and the unquestionable responsiveness to the sensuous of eye and ear—all these qualities are remarkable enough in the 'Interludes' and in a really noteworthy ode on 'Indignation.'"

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

EMBLEMS OF LOVE

DESIGNED IN SEVERAL DISCOURSES

Crown 8vo. 5s. net

SOME OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

The Times.—"It must be said at once that this poet's new book is of the sort that sets a critic to consider his standards with a cautiousness which is in itself the truest compliment he can pay. There is no question that in these poems a free-handed vigour of style is joined to a spirit of intellectual enterprise in no way afraid of committing itself to exposed positions. . . . Mr Abercrombie's poetry is of a weight and texture which not only bears but demands analysis. . . . Mr Abercrombie has an imagination which throws out ornament and illustration, with free scattering gestures more rapidly than a reader, trying to appreciate all that is offered him, can easily keep up with. Yet as a matter of fact he holds it unmistakably in its place, and proves that he has that much rarer gift than a prolific imagination, a true sense of pace and direction. This command of clarity is very striking in a writer to whom enrichment is so easy. . . . one natural consequence of this masterful way with words is that Mr Abercrombie's diction, though no doubt it has its affinities, is his own, and troubles us with no obvious echoes of anyone else; and in these days to be able to say that of a style so sharply marked is an unusual tribute."

Daily News.—"Mr Abercrombie's new volume contains work which sets him in the very first rank of contemporary poets."

Westminster Gazette.—"Here is an imaginative power of a range and intensity and continuance that quotation cannot reveal. It is his whole book that represents the height of his achievement not any one passage or succession of passages. It is not a necklet of jewels but an Aladdin's cave."

Liverpool Courier.—"The difficulty of the critic of such verse as this is to retain due measure in his praise; to refrain from what may seem mere hyperbole. But it is impossible not to feel that, by this book of Mr Abercrombie's, English literature has been signally and permanently enriched. It is such as only a truly great poet could have written, and that assurance, in this lean age forlorn, is of immense significance. There is a new organ-voice in England."

